

PREACHING WITH THE THEOLOGY OF SCHUBERT OGDEN

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
the School of Theology at Claremont

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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June 1977

***This professional project, completed by***

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***has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty  
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of***

***DOCTOR OF MINISTRY***

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## ABSTRACT

This project attempts to demonstrate the ways in which the theology of Schubert M. Ogden illuminates the theological concepts of God as Father, (the question of personhood), God as Christ, (the question of myth), and God as Holy Spirit, (the question of transcendence). With such illumination, three sermons are developed along these themes which rest upon Ogden's thought. The conclusion is that Ogden's thought is free of many contradictions inherent in some traditional theologies, and that this consistency makes it particularly appropriate for thoughtful preaching to reflective persons. This is demonstrated in three written sermons.

## CHAPTER ONE

## THE PROBLEM

The problem I address is that of preaching utilizing the theology of Schubert M. Ogden, which is based upon the philosophy of Charles Hartshorne and the New Testament theology of Rudolph Bultmann. Using a theology like Ogden's is important because it is not burdened with some of the conceptual problems and contradictions commonly found in classical theism. It does not have to answer to the criticism that Hartshorne levels against traditional theology, where what is called a contradiction by normal logical processes is called a paradox when it concerns God.<sup>1</sup> The heritage of this more adequate theology Hartshorne credits to such persons as Mukerji, Varisco, Berdyaev, James Ward, W. E. Hocking, E. S. Brightman, W. P. Montague, and A. N. Whitehead.<sup>2</sup> Hartshorne asks,

Their reward for this achievement? The nearly complete silence or noncomprehension of historians, encyclopedists, and textbook writers.<sup>3</sup>

Hartshorne's account of the reasons for this silence comes as he dedicates his book to those mentioned above by saying, "Their example may give comfort to those who would rather come as close as possible to difficult

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Hartshorne, A Natural Theology for Our Time (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1973), pp. vii-viii.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. viii.

truths than enjoy facile half-truths in the best of company."<sup>4</sup>

This is also similar to the problem of preaching with the theology of Schubert Ogden. It is easier to preach a popular half-truth than a difficult truth which more adequately conforms to a satisfactory vision of reality. To preach with the presuppositions of Ogden's theology is to preach sermons not laden with easy answers or pat solutions regarding the precise nature of God or even of existence itself. It is to preach the truths that are more elusive, the truths that cannot be reduced to overly-simple formulae or trite axioms.

A problem not unrelated to that mentioned above is the fact that Ogden's, Hartshorne's, and others' books which encompass what might be called neo-classical theology, are usually written more for advanced seminarians rather than for laypersons. They are apologetic, but for those who have wrestled with and perhaps even abandoned classical theology rather than for those who may not have come to such a junction or who have not seriously reflected upon the issues of theology in the first place.

And so, the task of preaching within the theological framework of Ogden, must be first to construct a viable metaphysical framework within which God language and biblical language will make sense, and secondly, to correct and improve upon the conceptions which have previously led to an often confused and misappropriated faith. Such a task in its totality is beyond the scope of this project. However, this project may at least represent a personal effort to begin as I see and understand my task as a preacher and as a theologian at this time.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to demonstrate in three areas the adequacy of Ogden's theology and to utilize these particular perspectives in three written sermons. The sermons and the discussion which will precede them will be related to the following topics: God as Father, God as Christ, and God as Holy Spirit. Since these are broad areas, it is hoped that the sermons will serve simply as indications of the potential of neo-classical theology for effective preaching.

## ASSUMPTIONS

I assume that Ogden's theology is adequate for affirming the central tenets of the Christian faith, and that it is therefore also adequate for the task of preaching.

I assume also, that preaching still has a vital future because it can, in fact, communicate and re-present the God already present in our existence.



## LIMITATIONS

It should be stated that preference for using Ogden's theology with regard to the task of preaching is not one which should imply that his is the only adequate theology. More accurately, the preference suggests my own limitations with regard to the mastery of all the areas and exponents of various theologies. I do not possess a Ph.D. in theology, if that is significant. More precisely stated, Schubert Ogden's theology (recognizing the fact that it is not one he possesses exclusively or arrived at independently) is one of the most adequate to which I have been exposed. And so, because of my own personal commitment to it, the limits of my interest, and the scope of this project, Ogden's will be the only theology discussed in relation to preaching. This project is not, then, a formal survey of theologies with the intent of finding the one most suited for the task of preaching. Rather, only one theology is seriously considered for the task from the beginning on the basis of the merits I have previously perceived in it.

Another limitation of this project is that its practical application is necessarily limited to the written sermon. This is not to equate preaching with writing a sermon. It is simply to admit that written sermons do not have the potential they could have when the words are animated through a live personality in the context of a particular occasion. And so, the particular dimensions of actually delivering sermons will not be a subject of this essay.

## METHODOLOGY

As stated in the purpose, the task of this project is to demonstrate the adequacy of Ogden's theology, and to utilize its perspective in written sermons.

This two dimensional task will be attempted in the three areas mentioned above. Ogden's theology will be discussed in relation to other contemporary theologians' perspectives regarding God as Father—The Question of Personhood, God as Christ—The Question of Myth, and God as Holy Spirit—The Question of Transcendence. I will seek to demonstrate how Ogden's thought in these three areas appears to be more suitable than that of the others, i.e. Gordon Kaufman, John MacQuarrie, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and New Testament scholar, Rudolph Bultmann. After each of these discussions will follow a sermon which utilizes some of the insights gained from Ogden's theology and is made possible by clarifying insights he has to offer.

The sermons will be written for an 800-member upper-middle class, predominately white, United Methodist congregation in Southern California. The Wesleyan model of structuring the sermons will be used in which the general thrust moves from alienation to redemption to discipleship. A brief introduction will point out how Ogden's thought contributes to the general shape of each sermon and/or how his thought frees me to preach such a sermon.

## CHAPTER TWO

## GOD AS FATHER— THE QUESTION OF PERSONHOOD

Perhaps this section is mistitled by including the word, "Father." My intention is not to set up a sexist debate of whether or not to use the words "Mother" or "Parent" in the place of the traditional "Father." Rather, the issue here is the one logically prior to the sexist issue, or even the parent issue for that matter, and this is the issue of whether or not it makes sense to speak of God as "person" at all. If this can be established, then one may more seriously treat the other issues of parenthood and gender. The central concern of this discussion is the issue of the personhood of God. Clarity with regard to understanding God as person is essential to grasping other Christian notions of God as Christ and God as Holy Spirit.

Today, few theologians would deny personhood to God, as did Johann Gottlieb Fichte in the 18th century, by insisting that the idea of God as person cannot exist without contradiction because it would parallel God with the finite.<sup>1</sup> Most theologians do understand God as person. However, they do so in an inadequate way by either conceptual confusion or by the incompleteness of their development of the notion. This I will seek to demonstrate in the following pages by utilizing the thoughts of some contemporary theologians: MacQuarrie, Kaufman, and

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<sup>1</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, The Apostle's Creed (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 27.

Pannenberg. Their understandings will be developed in contrast to Ogden's which seems to grasp the problem more appropriately.

John MacQuarrie, an Anglo-Catholic theologian, describes the three persons of the Triune God as Primordial Being, Expressive Being, and as Unitive Being. He explains that the word, "person," had a different meaning when the Trinity was formulated than it does today, and that it is perhaps best to leave that meaning shadowy. He refers to the Augustinian formula of using the word "person" as better said than not, and yet his reason for doing so is not clear. He also points out that the Greeks used an ambiguous word that did not necessarily imply person, when they described the three aspects of God.<sup>2</sup> In referring to the Primordial Being, MacQuarrie characterizes the Father as the act or energy of letting be; in referring to Expressive Being, he characterizes the Son as Primordial Being giving rise to particular beings; and in referring to Unitive Being, he characterizes the Holy Spirit as maintaining the unity between Primordial Being and Expressive Being. The thesis of his "Triune God" chapter is that the language of "persons" is archaic today.<sup>3</sup>

In attaching the trait of goodness to God, MacQuarrie clumsily explains that we do not really know what this word means when applied to God, but yet it is more appropriate to speak of God as good rather than not good, because God allows good its existence.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, here one

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<sup>2</sup>John MacQuarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

must ask, does not God also enable evil to exist? Why not attribute evilness to God also? It is clear that MacQuarrie's trend of reasoning in this instance does not adequately bridge the gap between the Being that allows beings and the attributes that we are accustomed to attaching to God.

One might think that a theologian, when describing how man is created in God's image, would describe personality traits belonging to God, and then how man possesses them. But again, with MacQuarrie, man's image is understood in a way that is almost totally devoid of personhood. Quoting here would most justly serve my purposes. "We must think of the imago Dei more in terms of a potentiality for being that is given to man with his very being, than in terms of a fixed 'endowment' or 'nature'."<sup>5</sup> In its vagueness, one can sense here that MacQuarrie prefers to de-emphasize God's personhood, and perhaps, even man's.

When thinking as MacQuarrie does, one is tempted to wonder why Jesus referred to God as Father. Certainly this does not aptly describe Primordial Being. In adhering solely to the doctrine of the Primordial Being, one must conclude that Jesus did not really understand what God was, or that perhaps his language was, as MacQuarrie would view it, archaic. In any case, MacQuarrie's treatment of God's personhood is inadequate because he does not use the word, "person," in a way consistent with our normal usage.

The systematic theology of Gordon D. Kaufman, provides quite a different picture of the personhood of God. Kaufman, unlike MacQuarrie,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

works from within the tradition of the Christian faith as it is known and expressed through the Bible.

God is manifest through his self-revelation in history. The Hebrews do not know their God as a removed ground of being or as a vague personal figure. Their God has a name, Yahweh, and they call upon him as if in a personal relationship with Him. This is much different from the kind of concept dealt with in MacQuarrie's thinking. Calling upon God as Being would be alien to the Hebrew mind.

Kaufman insists flatly that if we are speaking of a Christian doctrine of God, God must be defined by his revelation in Jesus Christ, for "natural theology by itself is no adequate basis for making affirmations about God."<sup>6</sup> Personal analogies and symbols are the primary tools for understanding God, and nonpersonal symbols need only secondary attention. Kaufman compiles a list of personal characteristics: God is one who acts, He is known by his deeds, He is dynamic will, He has purposes, his character is absolutely loving, He communicates his love through self-sacrifice and persuades men, freeing them from doubt and anxiety.<sup>7</sup>

The primary analogy that defines all others is the human person. Kaufman maintains that this is not because of some "anthropocentric predilection for anthropomorphism but because God himself chose this analogy as the vehicle of his revelation to man."<sup>8</sup> Kaufman connects Being with personal attributes only through the leap of faith, and then

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<sup>6</sup>Gordon D. Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 112.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

he accentuates to a high degree the personhood of God as He is known in the Bible. This does not really approach the problem of speaking of God as person. It merely restates it fideistically.

Wolfgang Pannenberg outlines a brief sketch of person in relationship to God in the thinking of Fichte, Feuerbach, and Hegel. As mentioned above, Fichte believed that the idea of person includes the notion of the finite. Hence, God could not be described as person without some kind of contradiction. Feuerbach absolutized Fichte's reasoning in the direction of man, by suggesting that God is merely a projection of man's wishes, the imaginary perfected version of man's limited personality traits and virtues. Hegel sought to bring man out of his finite state of being by positing that man has the ability to lose himself into other entities, enabling him to identify with them, and thus becoming infinite. In this way, personality does not detract from God's infinity. Here, however, Pannenberg points out a difficulty with Hegel's scheme—the finiteness of a person is measured by his very inability to completely identify himself with another it or thou, for we can only unite with or know the other in a limited way.<sup>9</sup>

Whether we are aware of it or not, Pannenberg maintains, it is not possible to talk of God without including the aspect of personality.<sup>10</sup> The idea of attributing personality to the ground of reality, he suggests, is probably related to the mystery and the unknown that we experience in events. We admit to being unable ultimately to explain or manipulate, except on a surface level, the depths of a human person. This consti-

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<sup>9</sup>Pannenberg, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

tutes one's existence as a personal self. In a similar way we cannot ultimately, but only on a surface level, describe the universe. What is unknown about it motivates us to explain or describe the ground of the universe as a self, or as personal. The Hebrews experienced this self as a power that revealed itself in ever new events as a consistent influence, giving unity to their history, a history that seemed to be different from what they would like to plan.<sup>11</sup>

Ogden seeks a conceptuality that will describe God as person, one which is not so obscure and one which does not rely upon inadequate traditional metaphysical and theological premises.<sup>12</sup> He quotes Bonhoeffer as radically describing God as one who suffers, but not, through no fault of the author, adequately clarified. Ogden then criticizes Tillich and Bultmann in a fashion similar to the one in which I criticized MacQuarrie: if God is called "being itself" or "the absolute," then regardless of symbolic descriptions implying personhood, this God is immutable and not relative to others. Such a God is not capable of personhood.<sup>13</sup>

When adequate answers seem almost impossible to come by, one might assume that one is asking the wrong question. This is the approach that Ogden resolves to utilize in dealing with the personhood of God. Rather than ask, "How can the Absolute somehow be understood as personal?" perhaps we should instead ask, "How can the eminently personal One

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-40.

<sup>12</sup>Schubert M. Ogden, The Reality of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 53.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 55.



be appropriately conceived in his absoluteness?"<sup>14</sup>

This new question is based upon a new theistic conception, and here, Ogden quotes Whitehead's "reformed subjectivist principle." In essence, reality, or the prime source of knowledge of reality, is found in the experience of the self.<sup>15</sup> As the self is a becoming and ever-changing and growing entity, likewise, so is God. Part of a positive perfection is growth, implying a non-static dynamic existence. If God is not dynamic, it is not meaningful to speak of him as personal.

By conceiving of God as infinite personal existence Ogden suggests that God is independent of the world in an abstract sense and that he is included in the actual world in a concrete sense as the ground of the world.<sup>16</sup> This leads to a most useful analogy in describing the personhood of God. I will quote Ogden for greatest clarity: "God is related to the universe of other beings somewhat as the human self is related to its body."<sup>17</sup> In other words, God/beings::Self/body. This does not inclusively answer the question as to specifically why God has personal attributes, (or why the Personal One is related to the Absolute,) but it does, I believe, adequately describe the relationship, and account for why that relationship cannot be systematically and totally explained. Using the half of the analogy that we know best, it must be emphasized that the human self is not independent of the body. It refers to that highly complex mode of existence (mind-spirit-body-etc. intertwined) that

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

is expressed through the body, and inseparable from it. Likewise, God is not known to us apart from beings, ours or others, and he is, though not in a way that can be completely explained, personal as an existing self. To understand the complexities and problems involved in the body-mind paradigm is to understand the relationship that Ogden is proposing.

At this point we can begin to make sense of speaking of how God "acts" in history. Ogden writes,

what is meant when we say that God acts in history is primarily that there are certain distinctively human words and deeds in which his characteristic action as Creator and Redeemer is appropriately re-presented or revealed. We mean that there are some human actions, some specific attempts to express the ultimate truth of our existence through symbolic words and deeds, that are vastly more than merely human actions. Because through them nothing less than the transcendent action of God himself is re-presented, they are also acts of God, that is, they are acts of God analogously to the way in which our outer acts are our acts insofar as they re-present our own characteristic decisions as selves or persons.<sup>18</sup>

And what characterizes God in the first place? What is the central aspect of God's personality, so to speak? Ogden makes this claim:

I hold that the primary use or function of 'God' is to refer to the objective ground in reality itself of our ineradicable confidence in the final worth of our existence.<sup>19</sup>

This confidence is established by our experiencing in some way "pure unbounded love:"

At the beginning and end of all our ways is One in whose steadfast will and purpose there is indeed no shadow of turning and in whom all our confidences have their unshakable foundation. This same God, however, is infinitely other and more than the 'deus philosophorum,' the mere metaphysical Absolute. In his inmost actuality he is 'pure unbounded love,' pure personal relation to others, who has no other cause than the ever more abundant life of the creatures

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

of his love. Far from being something to which even the greatest of our accomplishments is worth nothing at all, he is the One who makes even the least of things to be of infinite worth by giving it to share in his own infinite and all-encompassing life. He is, in fact, just that 'enduring remembrance,' except for which our perishing lives as creatures would indeed be vanity and a striving after wind.<sup>20</sup>

In summary then, Ogden most adequately describes God in the kinds of personal terms that can most aptly be understood to be attributes of a Parent, or Father. God is relational, effected by what we do. God is that without which we would not exist, for our existence is but a part of God's existence. Our existence is grounded in the security and confidence that our life is of value, that we are loved. MacQuarrie makes a case for God as Being itself, but personal attributes do not readily follow. Kaufman begins with the attributes, but poorly connects them with what could be understood universally as the absolute. Panenberg accounts for the personhood of God functionally as the result of the mystery of the universe, but fails to grasp the problem as inclusively as Ogden. God can be understood as personal, as relational, and also as absolute, for "his relativity to others is wholly nonrelative, and so quite literally absolute."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

## CHAPTER THREE

## SERMON I

The initial thrust of this sermon is to demonstrate how our own efforts cannot yield a general confidence in the value of life. In fact, such efforts can sometimes increase a feeling of futility. Judgment may come through for those who might be trying to contrive security in one of the many ways mentioned in the alienation section. Most surprising to some might be that works-righteousness does not work in the Christian church.

Redemption occurs when we live with the consciousness that life is valuable before we even begin to try to make it so. The good news is that we are created by God, sustained by God, and loved by God. Such a realization frees us from defensiveness and the need to justify ourselves. The last paragraph of the redemption section is largely a quote from Ogden. By that point in the sermon, it can be delivered in a slow, calm, almost authoritarian tone, proclaiming decisively our redemption and leading into the demand of such redemption.

The discipleship section brings out the implications of experiencing redemption both in terms of our own relationship to God and our relationship to others. We are free to love others as we see more clearly their own desperate attempts to justify themselves. And, we can become extensions of God's love in the universe. Our acts can become the acts of God himself. Rather than lose life, we lose a futile existence, when we respond to the gift of God's love.

## LIVE LIFE ALIVE

### INTRODUCTION

Some think of the Kingdom of Heaven as a mystical city of golden streets and ivory towers. Some think of it as a pleasant after-life. And yet others think of it as a state of growth, aliveness, and perfection here and now on earth. But regardless of anyone's notion of that ideal kingdom, it is clear that Jesus was not convinced everyone would enter it. "The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." "Not everyone saying Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

All of us exist. We are breathing, our hearts are beating, we are perceiving some features of our environments. And yet, Jesus suggests that while we exist, we are not necessarily alive. We are living, but most of us are not alive. We are not really experiencing Life.

Most of us are aware of this paradox in our everyday living. We know that we are physically functioning and we experience some sort of consciousness, and yet, we struggle to do more than merely survive. Somehow, somewhere, there is more than just getting by, there is more than waking, working, eating and sleeping; waking, working, eating and sleeping; and then eventually, an end to it all.

There is more, but there is considerable disagreement as to what that more is. Christians speak of it as the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. But how do we really arrive into such a Kingdom, if

ever?

#### ALIENATION (JUDGMENT)

In order to come to grips with the way that leads to aliveness and joy in the Kingdom of Heaven, it is helpful to examine those patterns of behavior which many people believe provide the ultimate fulfillment. By looking at these patterns it becomes clear that some seem to work, but far too many plainly do not. Consciously or unconsciously, one way or another, we drive for the security of the Kingdom.

We try the "thing" route, along with the old "more is better" routine. We buy a home, but that's not enough. We get the right cars, but that doesn't work either. We have the right boat or cabin or plane, but they don't do the trick. Perhaps if we traded up, that would work. If it doesn't perhaps something more unique, more antique, or simply more will do.

Those who tire of the material things ballgame move on to different lifestyles. If we just get that job, you know, the one with the increased status, benefits, money, power, and challenges, that will do it. Just think of it: automatic happiness! Instant success! And if the job doesn't do it, we'll try doing something else, and then something else...until we are happy.

Some are convinced that education is the cure-all. With the proper degree, the right training at the right place, we can solve all of our problems, including the little ticklish one about meaning and purpose in our lives. But that doesn't work any better than some of our

other solutions.

We begin to wonder if it's the friends we are keeping. We begin to wonder if it's our mate. But changes in those areas do not bring all of the satisfaction in life that we hoped they would. There must be more to life, but what is it? How do we find it? How do we initiate that elusive kingdom that guided the man we call Lord?

Having reached plateaus in our things quest, we begin more radical experiments. We indulge in the "with it" and popular cult fads of our time. Astrology we call entertainment, but we seriously muse over our horoscopes. Varieties of meditations beckon us to taste of their fruits. E.S.T. and other training seminars hold out before us the chances of "getting it," if we will only pay the modest, or at times, immodest, fees. But the mind-trips and meditations fall short, also. It seems that we cannot build the kingdom on our own.

And so, many of us finally come to the church crying "Lord, Lord," only to find Jesus warning us that not everyone crying out in such a manner will enter the Kingdom either. Jesus' words back us into a corner where we are forced to ask, is there any hope anywhere ~~for the King-~~dom of God on earth, as it is in heaven? Isn't it enough that we acknowledge Jesus as Lord? Isn't it enough that we join a church? Isn't it enough that we agree to certain spiritual laws? Isn't that enough for the Kingdom to be real? And over and over and over again, the more we strive for our own dependable security, the more life evades us. And so, out of desperation we throw all hope into the future, hoping that maybe, someday, some year, we will be happy and content, joyous and alive, we will sense fully the value and meaning of existence that now

only frustrates and puzzles us. We keep waiting to experience life completely. But the day never comes. And tomorrow, the day which we never live, becomes the burial ground for life in the present.

The prophet Isaiah addressed a united and prosperous Israel when he warned them of a coming judgment. He was particularly concerned with an over-dependence upon material things, mistakenly labelled as valuable.

"Their land is filled with silver and gold,  
and there is no end to their treasures;  
their land is filled with horses,  
and there is no end to their chariots.  
Their land is filled with idols;  
they bow down to the work of their hands,  
to what their own fingers have made." (Is. 2<sub>7-8</sub>)

Isaiah's words have a very contemporary flavor because the human predicament has not changed much over the hundreds of years that separate us from him. We continue to contrive false securities, we still admire the person whose life obviously doesn't work, but who proclaims nevertheless, "I did it my way." Such a claim is our excuse for patronizing the non-gods put on display in the local pantheons. The gods of things, the gods of contrived security are readily available as our stand-in idols and we may worship them all our days. We have this freedom to worship what we will. And we have nothing to lose...but our life.

#### REDEMPTION (GRACE)

To begin to recognize that our lives are not working, to recognize when we are not experiencing happiness and joy and abundance, is to prepare ourselves for what is meaningful and valuable and of ultimate



worth. The biblical call to confession and repentance before God is nothing other than the call to us to stop trying to create our own security. Our quest constantly to create our own happiness, our attempt to make gods of the works of our hands, and our instigating of what we think should be God's kingdom, are all fruitless efforts; first, because they do not work for long, and second, it is not necessary for us to create our own security, for it has already been given to us.

The good news that comes to us, if we are but sensitive to creation and our innermost selves, is that we are okay, exactly as we are. If we but take a few moments to be alone, be it walking on the beach, listening to the breeze through mountain pines, or in the comfort of our own homes, if we can somehow look at our lives without all of the tinsel we hang on them, if we can quit playing our "I've got it all together" tape and our "as the world turns" tape, if we can break away just long enough from the artificiality of so much of our existence, we will be pleasantly surprised to find that we can live and be happy without carrying all of our self-contrived "necessities."

God creates us. We do not create ourselves. Life is a gift given to us, we did not give it to ourselves. We need merely to accept life as the gift that it is, rather than pretend that we must invent it all over again or change it to fit particular molds of culturally-defined acceptability. We live and we move, and we have our being in God's creation. And it is in absolute trust in the same God that we find the secret to abundant and meaningful life. When we look solely to God as the ultimate justifier of our lives, we are free from having to validate our lives in terms of this world, we are free to live in

openness to our world and its possibilities rather than be trapped by our world for some kind of defense of our existence.

When I trust solely in God for my security and worth, I need not be a citizen of a particular country in order to be justified as a person. I need not have a specific education in order to be accepted. I need not know the right people in order to belong. I need not possess the right kinds of things in order to be civilized. When God is the final rock upon which I build the house of my existence, I am on the same firm foundation which gave me breath in the first place. I do lose a life of struggling to be me, but in relinquishing the need to have to project some kind of self-made image of who I am, I am free to experience life in all its abundance. I no longer have to twist and contort the world in order to see only those things which support who I must be in order to survive. I become who I am, and I am who I am.

One of the most beautiful pieces of literature is the 23rd Psalm which expresses the kind of confidence that we all can experience at the depths of our being. Whether or not we fully appropriate the psalmist's faith may determine the extent to which we are free to be what we are ultimately called to be.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall want nothing;  
 he makes me lie down in green pastures.  
 He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.  
 He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
 I fear no evil; for thou art with me;  
 thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.  
 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
 thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.  
 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;  
 and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

God is pure unbounded love, God is pure personal relation to

others. God has no other cause than the ever more abundant life of the creatures of his love. Without God in our lives, our perishing existence would be all vanity and a striving after wind. God makes the least accomplishment of our lives to be of infinite worth by giving it to share in his own infinite and all-embracing life. We live, and we move, and we have our breath in God. To the extent we realize this, God is made known to others, for his love will be revealed through us.

#### DISCIPLESHIP (SERVICE)

At the same time that God's love is a gift inherent in life itself, it is also a demand. And so, Jesus describes the one who enters the Kingdom of Heaven as "he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." When we have appropriated life in its fullness, when we function with the confidence that we are of value, and when we are aware of the importance of what we do because of its ultimate impact upon the whole of the universe, then our eyes are opened to new visions and insights that we seldom experience when we are so busy trying to make something of ourselves on our own.

All of a sudden, the persons who always came across to us as over-bearing, appear as persons who are desperately crying out for affirmation; and we are moved to love them and affirm them. Suddenly those who had sickened us by their cheating and lying and dishonesty, become those who are lost in a world gone mad with its senseless idols; and we are moved to love them, that they might experience the one true God. And those who suffer from want of food and other necessities no

longer appear as those who are lazy and undisciplined, for we begin to see how we are responsible for their plight, and we are moved to love them by making the kinds of sacrifices we never dreamed before we could make, and the 10% tithe doesn't seem like enough to give.

When we experience life in its fullness, new emotions creep into our consciousness, swaying our usual high regard for only ourselves. Through empathy, we feel and identify with others in ways never possible before. Rather than experience only our own emotions and perspectives, our lives are enlarged by the joys and pains of others, and somehow we love them, but not for any advantage or control over them. Through compassion we are moved to give up part of what we have called ours in order that another may live more fully as well. Love no longer becomes an ideal cherished only by the naive and presumptuous. It becomes an obligation and demand upon our lives that we can never shake loose, once we have experienced fully the call to do the will of the Father who is in heaven.

And finally, the One we call our Father in heaven, becomes something more than a theological theory, or a myth to be exploded. Our Father becomes—our Father, for we begin to realize that we are but extensions of his life in the universe. Some of our human actions, some specific words and deeds, become vastly more than mere human actions. For through them nothing less than the action of God himself is represented. Our actions can also be simultaneously, the actions of God.

Is it any wonder then, that those who confronted a man called Jesus of Nazareth, concluded that truly, he was the Son of God? Through him they experienced nothing less than the same gift and demand of love

that they experienced in their environment, in their consciences, and in the words of the prophets before them who spoke of the God of all the universe.

We are called by that same God today, in this moment, to relinquish all attempts to contrive our home-made value and worth. We are already loved and created to be what we can be, without the hindrance of justifying ourselves. Take hold of the gift that is your life; and live, and move and have your breath in loving service to others. You have nothing to lose but a futile and useless existence. Amen.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## GOD AS CHRIST—THE QUESTION OF MYTH

Ogden's christology is formulated as a modification of Rudolph Bultmann's theology and his call for demythologizing. Ogden summarizes Bultmann's program into two fundamental propositions:

- (1) Christian faith is to be interpreted exhaustively and without remainder as man's original possibility of authentic historical existence as this is more or less adequately clarified and conceptualized by an appropriate philosophical analysis.
- (2) Christian faith is actually realizable, or is a "possibility in fact," only because of the particular historical event Jesus of Nazareth, which is the originative event of the church and its distinctive word and sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

The first proposition is one with which Ogden is in full agreement, for many reasons. It assumes that the primary elements at stake in the Christian message are independent of the truth or falsity of the mythological assertions made by the New Testament writers, that Christian faith is the possibility of "existentiell" (knowledge of, as opposed to, knowledge about) self-understanding, and that the essence of the Christian faith is available to any perceptive person as such.<sup>2</sup> These assumptions are motivated by the "demand of modern man for a demythologized New Testament," and by the belief that "this is the only way the Christian faith itself can find adequate expression."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Schubert M. Ogden, Christ without Myth (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 112.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

It is with the second proposition, when held in conjunction with the first, that difficulties become apparent. It is impossible logically for Christian faith both to be an original possibility for all persons and at the same time to be possible only because of a particular historical event. This contradiction Bultmann tries to solve by speaking of a distinction between "possibility in principle," as that given to persons before the event of Jesus of Nazareth, and "possibility in fact," that possibility we realize now after the historical Jesus. But this ploy, as Ogden maintains, merely restates the difficulty.<sup>4</sup>

Ogden solves the contradictions between propositions one and two at the expense of forfeiting an understanding of Jesus of Nazareth that would make him the exclusive bearer of the possibility of authentic historical existence. Thus, he words a modified proposition two as follows:

Christian faith is always a 'possibility in fact' because of the unconditioned gift and demand of God's love, which is the ever-present ground and end of all created things; the decisive manifestation of which fulfills and corrects all other manifestations and is the originative event of the church and its distinctive word and sacraments.<sup>5</sup>

And again, as proposition one was justified as a demand of the Christian faith itself, so is proposition two. Using Paul as the model, Ogden suggests that the Letter to the Romans aptly illustrates that it was understood that no other revelation was given through Jesus than was evident to all persons since the beginning.

Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 117-118.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

although they knew God they did not honor him as God...  
Romans 1<sup>20</sup>

He points out also that Paul summons us to share the faith of Abraham not because he believed in Jesus, obviously, but because Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," (Romans 4<sub>3</sub>).

And so, "one Lord, Jesus Christ," has for Paul exactly the same existential significance as did his notion of "God the Father."<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, the underlying intention of all his christological formulations is to affirm that the history of Jesus of Nazareth is the decisive re-presentation to all mankind of the same promise and demand re-presented by the Old Testament revelation (cf. Romans 3<sub>21</sub>)—and, beyond that, also attested by the whole of creation and man's conscience as well (cf. Romans 1<sub>18f.</sub>, 2<sub>15</sub>).<sup>7</sup>

And what is meant by speaking of Jesus' act as decisive? It is to say that:

in him, in his outer acts of symbolic word and deed, there is expressed 'that' understanding of human existence which is, in fact, the ultimate truth about our life before God; that the ultimate reality with which we and all men have to do is God the sovereign Creator and Redeemer, and that in understanding ourselves in terms of the gift and demand of his love, we realize our authentic existence as men.<sup>8</sup>

In further clarification of the relationship of the empirical-historical question of Jesus to the existential-historical question, Ogden makes three assertions. First, the New Testament accounts take for granted the historical existence of Jesus, and there is no reason to doubt his historical existence. Quoting Bultmann, "the doubt whether Jesus really existed is unfounded and not worth refutation. That he stands as the founder behind the historical movement whose first acces-

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<sup>6</sup>Schubert M. Ogden, The Reality of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 202.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. pp. 185-186.



sible stage is represented by the earliest Palestinian community is perfectly clear."<sup>9</sup> Second, there is a logical difference between taking as true and asserting as true Jesus' empirical-historical existence. The New Testament does not assert Jesus' empirical-historical existence (this is assumed), rather, the New Testament asserts the significance of Jesus existence. And so, third, Christian faith is a response to the event of Christ as it is asserted (as it is based upon the event of Jesus which is assumed.) The existential history of Christ takes place in the word being proclaimed. And again, quoting Bultmann, "Christ crucified and risen encounters us in the word of proclamation and nowhere else," and "it is not the historical Jesus but rather, Jesus Christ as the one who is preached, who is the Lord."<sup>10</sup> This understanding undergirds Ogden's claim that the point of Christology is strictly existential.<sup>11</sup>

The call to interpret Christology in this way radically affects the manner in which we must understand both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus. In asserting Jesus' divinity, one asserts that "that possibility here and now re-presented to me in the Christian witness of faith is God's own gift and demand to my existence."<sup>12</sup> And in asserting Jesus' humanity one means that one is confronted with this possibility here and now as it is re-presented as a historical event as opposed to a general idea or axiom. These are assertions of Christian faith, the decisive

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<sup>9</sup>Schubert M. Ogden, "The Point of Christology," The Journal of Religion, LV (October 1975), 383.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 383-384.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 385.

re-presentation of the primal word which is "the ultimate truth of human existence: that we are here and now totally accepted and totally claimed, being thereby freed both from and for ourselves and others within the encompassing mystery of God's love."<sup>13</sup>

By expressing God's claim and acceptance upon our lives through speech and action, Jesus of Nazareth becomes a channel of God's grace, he becomes Christ. Our Christian faith is a response to this Christ-event as it is asserted.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid. pp. 385-386.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## SERMON II

This sermon begins by recognizing the Temptation account as myth. It does so without denying an empirical-historical event, while at the same time emphasizing primarily the existential significance. To set up an argument denying the historicity of the account would not aid in communicating the intended truths.

Throughout the **alienation** section, some of the general ways in which we can separate ourselves from God are elucidated. These ways, like those of Sermon I, are attempts to create our own security by adherence to principles which are independent of God as understood in the Old Testament and by Jesus. An attempt is made throughout to demonstrate how Jesus ~~re~~represents the same God of the Old Testament, and how he is fully responsible as a human in bringing God into control of his decisions. Ogden frees me to preach an understanding of Jesus as totally consistent with the Old Testament but at the same time decisive by describing Jesus' manifestation as fulfilling and correcting all others and originating in the event of the Church ~~with~~ its distinctive character.

In the redemption section the decisiveness of Jesus' re-presentation of the gift and demand of God's love is again emphasized, (over and above what we might have expected from a Rabbi.) His outer actions in symbolic word and deed express the ultimate truth about our life

before God. As Ogden would explain, Christ (his existential-historical nature) comes alive as he is proclaimed. This is the real redemptive possibility in this sermon. (Presupposed by the sermon, as by the New Testament, is the empirical-historical Jesus.)

The implications spelled out in the discipleship section are straightforward: appropriate the understanding that Jesus re-presents, and re-present such an understanding ourselves, i.e. in understanding ourselves in relationship to God's love we can realize authentic existence.

# THE DEVIL YOU SAY? LUKE 4<sub>1-13</sub>

## INTRODUCTION

Serve God, or go to the devil! That, in a nutshell, is the central message of the temptation account. Both Matthew and Luke write of Jesus' temptations immediately after their accounts of his baptism. And in so doing, they describe a time when Jesus wrestles with the significance of his baptism and of his ministry. The temptation accounts have a strong mythological flavor, for not only do they employ heavily loaded symbols, but they resonate with some internal struggles that we all experience.

When we come to grips with this cosmic encounter between Christ and Satan, we are thrown symbolically into the depths of our own psyches. We are confronted with our basic given freedom to serve either God or

or

the Evil One. Reading this account as but an interesting story about a person who lived a long time ago is the best way to miss the central point. But to read it in all of its richness is to be confronted with how Christ calls us here and now.

#### ALIENATION (JUDGMENT)

The temptation experience that Jesus goes through is one in which he chooses principles which will govern his life. He confronts various alternative lifestyles available to him as does any maturing young adult. A distinguishing mark of maturity is the refusal to act merely upon personal impulse or whim. A mature individual establishes in advance the principles by which he or she lives; and then, everyday decisions become subject to those guidelines rather than to expediency or just plain chance.

All of us who consider ourselves mature have already chosen the guidelines that we allow to sway our destiny in each moment. But I would venture to say that few of us have chosen so consistently the principles that Jesus followed. Most of us have given in to the tempter. And I'd be willing to bet that it didn't take forty days and nights of fasting to weaken us. All of us have been or we are now giving in to either the pleasure principle or the power principle. And some of us have even selected the third temptation, to evade all personal responsibility whatsoever for what we, in fact, choose to do.

Contrary to popular belief, you don't have to be doing funny things with concrete at some bakery in order to turn stones into bread.

When the tempter approached a very hungry Jesus, he was inviting him to indulge in immediate pleasure in order to be satisfied. There is what we might call a demon in each of us that calls us into submission to the pleasure principle. This principle is one of our more primitive ones, applying to hungers of many types. Some of us, and I must include myself here, find that consuming much good food is high on our priority list. Eating is the way we handle our anxieties, and eating is often our only excuse for being with someone else. We have to counter-attack the "Big Mac Attack." In any case, we think it will make us feel good to constantly avoid the "hungries." But we really seek to be free from any displeasures whatsoever. We'll go for the pills to handle any little pains or recurring aches. We smoke because we're nervous, we drink so we don't have to "fly on one wing." We turn up our thermostats past 68° and then sit down to watch the news of our fellow citizens freezing back east. We like to be in a state of complete comfort, we want to be free of all tensions, including sexual. And so, we often adopt a lifestyle that conforms first, to the pleasure principle.

One of the most revealing experiences I ever endured was a week of survival training while I was a cadet at the Air Force Academy. One Monday morning we were loaded on a bus and taken deep into the rampart range of the Rockies behind Colorado Springs. Our food for one week came in the form of one live rabbit Wednesday night for every two cadets. We slept in the mountains without tents and we marched miles on end in rain without umbrellas. We were hungry, we were cold, we were very very tired. But through it all I discovered a fellowship, an esprit de corps they called it, that lifted us beyond our physical displeasures.

We adapted to our circumstances and even enjoyed becoming a part of nature's most beautiful and yet hostile environments. I discovered for the first time that food wasn't as important as I had always imagined. Life can sustain itself quite well without nearly so much help from the pleasure principle.

Jesus turned to the tempter and confronted him with words from his Jewish faith, found in the book of Deuteronomy, "Man shall not live by bread alone." It was at this point that he repudiated the significance of the pleasure principle for his life. He would not have a roof over his head, and he would not enjoy the pleasures of a regular income. Rather, he would enjoy the freedom not unlike that of the lilies of the field, which neither toil nor spin about what to wear or what to eat.

Contrary to popular belief, we needn't get calluses on our knees by kneeling before some red freak with horns and a forked tail, in order to worship the devil. When the tempter approached a lonely Jesus in the wastelands of Judea, he invited him to secure self-esteem and worth by becoming the political ruler over all the kingdoms of the world. There is a demon in each of us that calls us to submit to the power principle. This principle is the one in which we believe that our value and worth are to be realized through striving to achieve status and social prestige. We get down on our knees, we bend over low, and we tenderly kiss the devil's feet whenever we let the power drive rule us. Popularity and money seem to determine who has power in our culture. And so, with power as the ultimate motivating principle, we often find ourselves in positions in which we must compromise lower standards for higher ones.

The power principle will often dictate that our personal rela-

tionships must be subjugated to our business or organizational interests. We treat machines as people and people as machines. The business phrase, "time is money," often leads to the most perverted of relationships between employers and employees. People provide labor time, that time is money, and the money is power. Popularity becomes overly important. We can make Sybil, with her 16 different personalities, look normal when it comes to the number of faces we can display when we get a chance to gain power through popularity. We can come on to different folks as different persons. We feel them out and then we say the right things to please them. They begin to like us, and we begin to use them—all for influence and prestige and status and, most of all, power.

It doesn't take a long look back into history to find out where the power principle, as the sole source of value and worth, can lead a person... If we take care of first things first, status and prestige matters will take care of themselves without our help.

And so, Jesus does put first things first when he responds to the tempter, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." Again, Jesus answered on the basis of his faith in one Lord above all of creation, and he quoted again a verse from Deuteronomy. Jesus didn't become a political leader. He didn't ride a great white stallion into Jerusalem. But rather, our strange hero slowly rode on a little colt as it trod into the capitol city, and then he wept. What kind of power is that?

Contrary to popular belief, we don't have to get up on the roof of this church and make a flying leap towards Palos Verdes Boulevard, trusting in angels to save us from harm, in order to tempt God. Tempting



God, putting God to the test, giving up our share of living life with freedom, takes many forms. Some are obvious, but many are quite subtle. A little demon in us calls us to put off personal responsibility.

Never before have we had so many excuses for our behavior. In addition to the dictates of the stars and planets, we have psychoanalysts telling us that what happens in our childhood years determines who we are. Behaviorists describe the seemingly irreversible effects of conditioning. We can blame our parents for how we "came out." Some would have us believe we are motivated solely by a mysterious, perhaps chemical, survival instinct. Everything we do is ultimately shaped by our subconscious, uncontrollable will to survive. And so, with stars and conditioning and instincts and faulty environments, we can never, ever, be really be wrong. We simply do what comes naturally, and we have at it, we live carefree and recklessly. God will pull us out if there is any trouble. Everything will come up roses in the end. But the angels don't show up. And tragically, we find all too often those who hit bottom because they thought they could live contrary to the principles which really are at work in the universe.

Jesus refuses to relinquish his most precious human endowment, his personal responsibility for his actions. He doesn't lean on angels or God or anyone else to make his life easier. He doesn't throw himself from a pinnacle of the temple, but he does throw himself into a life of genuine loving. The angels did not bear him up. For eventually, he was borne up on a cross.

And he said to the tempter, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." He witnessed to his faith once again. And again, he quoted a

verse from the Old Testament Deuteronomy.

## REDEMPTION (GRACE)

On the surface of it, it would seem that Jesus said nothing different from what any good Rabbi would have said in such a diabolic encounter. Every word Jesus utters in the temptation account is but a quote from the Old Testament scriptures. One is tempted to ask, what makes Jesus so different? Why does Jesus, a good man, a good Jew, mark the division of our history into B.C. and A.D.?

The answer is not to be found in the verbal responses Jesus gave to the Evil One. Rather, the answer is to be found more in how Jesus lived out his responses. For Jesus lived out his responses in such a way that they took on a whole new dimension of reality for those who encountered him. Jesus re-presented to those who listened and watched him the principles, the values, the love of God himself, which had been available to them all the time, but which they missed through their blind adherence to the pleasure principle, the power principle, and their avoiding personal responsibility.

We find Jesus not only renouncing the pleasure principle, but actually demonstrating through living how life can be full and exciting without its dominance. Jesus not only renounces the power principle, but his life illustrates the total lack of its motivating him at all. He shows us the incredible power of persuasion rather than coercion. And finally, Jesus' claim to avoid tempting God is borne out by his total subjugation to the consequences of his loving even sinners. He embodies

the ultimate assumption of personal responsibility by letting his acts be acts of God. In so doing, he transformed his lot, a torture rack, into a symbol of faith which calls us in a decisive way to serve God only. When we totally commit our lives to loving others as God creatively loves, we needn't make excuses for what we do, for we are participating in the most vital force of creation.

And so, we are free from seeking first pleasure. We are free from seeking first power. And we are free to assume total responsibility for our lives as we live them within the dimension that includes God. For as one named Jesus of Nazareth truly lived with such freedom, we can be confident that such a possibility is ours, also.

#### DISCIPLESHIP (SERVICE)

The ethical implications of the temptation account speak to us in two fundamental ways. First, as disciples of Christ, we are called to follow the same principles by which He lived. Only in such a way can we possibly overcome the demons which always tempt us. Secondly, as we live by these principles, as our lives radiate the love of God, we are called to share our faith with others, that they too might have true life, true freedom, and true value and meaning. Christ loved when he experienced God's love. We love as we experience God's love through Christ. And others will love as they experience that same love through us. We are called first to love, and then to share the source of our love.

I love people most genuinely when I'm not trying to make them give me pleasure. I love people most authentically when I'm not trying

to influence them or exert power over them. And I love ~~people~~ most honestly when I assume full responsibility for my behavior. I do not merely fall in love, I love actively. I strive to love even those who reject my love, who misinterpret my love.

In short, we all can love when every day we meet Satan in the wastelands of our existence, and deal openly with the real demons that tempt us. We love when we emerge from that encounter convicted of the facts,

"Man shall not live by bread alone."

"You shall worship the Lord our God, and him only shall you serve."

"You shall not tempt the Lord your God."

And then the devil ends his temptations, and he departs from us until a more opportune time.

Let us pray,

Father and Lord, renew our vision of your rule on earth, that we might see beyond those less significant goals that so often snare us into servitude. We sense your call for us to transcend the merely normal. Help us to heed that call, as we seek to be disciples of your servant and our Master, Amen.

## CHAPTER SIX

## GOD AS HOLY SPIRIT--THE QUESTION OF TRANSCENDENCE

This chapter does not directly elucidate a theology of the Holy Spirit by Schubert Ogden. One finds little, if any, reference to the Holy Spirit in Ogden's writings. And so, admittedly, this chapter will be largely a conjecture as to how one might describe the Holy Spirit within the parameters of Ogden's thought as it is worked out in his writings which elucidate God's reality, and Christ without myth.

I propose that the Holy Spirit be understood as God made manifest, as the self-conscious appropriation of life as grace, and thus as meaningful. The central problem with such an experiential basis for relating to the Holy Spirit, is that it de-emphasizes, and some might contend, loses, those qualities of transcendence which belong to God. Not wanting to rob God of transcendence, I would at the same time prefer to make sense of the notion of the Holy Spirit as being more than just a belief or doctrine appended to an unreachable God.

In order to clarify this issue, to illustrate how it has been inadequately treated, and to demonstrate the potential of Ogden's thought to solve some of the conceptual problems involved in a more adequate manner, this chapter will be organized in a way similar to chapter two. That is, Ogden will be contrasted directly to other contemporary theologians, Gordon Kaufman and John MacQuarrie, whose theologies, though attempting to break God out of a transcendence prison, in fact, fail.

Kaufman attempts to describe the Holy Spirit as companion by analogies to human spirits and companions. In doing this, experiential language is used. For example, "The presence of God's Spirit in the church is simply his love mediated through the love of finite men."<sup>1</sup> Kaufman explains that a companion is one other than ourselves, and is yet like ourselves, a spirit. "When God is spoken of as 'spirit,' man's relation to him is interpreted in analogy with this most intimate and personal and inward relation in which men stand to each other."<sup>2</sup> The key word here is "analogy." For to understand the Holy Spirit in "primarily experiential terms, must be rejected as inadequate and misleading."<sup>3</sup>

Having used a few experiential analogies, Kaufman begins to rule out any experiential encounters with the Holy Spirit. Insisting on the transcendence of the Holy Spirit, he explains that God is spirit, "but he is utterly different from human spirits."<sup>4</sup> It is at this point that a reader of Kaufman's work begins to wonder why he bothered reading the analogies with human spirits in the first place. Kaufman continues to erase his experiential overtones as he maintains that the historical person-event of Jesus Christ empirically affirms the presence of the Holy Spirit "not so much in its reference to the special experience... as to the creative and living presence of this potent event in memory and

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon D. Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historist Perspective (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 227.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

culture."<sup>5</sup> The finishing touches to his development of the total transcendence of the Holy Spirit come as he warns against misapprehending pleasant warm feelings or ecstatic emotions, that "the knowledge of God never rests primarily on experimental evidence."<sup>6</sup> (It is odd, in view of this, that Kaufman dedicates his book "For Dorothy, intuitive theologian.") The Spirit is only experienced as one apprehends it in the community of faith as a love that bears all things, believes all things, etc. (I Cor. 13<sub>7f.</sub>). Kaufman quotes Paul, if "you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church." (I Cor. 14<sub>12</sub>)

And so, the Spirit is not a universally known manifestation of God. It is only known as one perceives pre-defined fruits of the Spirit as they are revealed in a believer who participates in the community of faith. Being holy, the Holy Spirit is of the totally other, beyond our direct knowledge, and only defined by the historical revelation of Jesus Christ. Kaufman presents a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, a concept for someone to affirm believing, but there is not a Holy Spirit that can be recognized as anything like a personal self, known to exist through a direct encounter with other personal entities. This view of the Holy Spirit describes a fixed, out there,,kind of phenomenon. It can and should be rejected as a viable means of understanding the transforming dynamics of a personal God. Kaufman's perspective comes through as inhumanly cold and rational, and not congruent with the warm spontaneous

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid..

love that should be associated with the Spirit of the God of love.

John MacQuarrie views the Holy Spirit as "God's coming to man in an inward way to enlighten and strengthen him."<sup>7</sup> Contrary to Kaufman, in MacQuarrie's view, the Holy Spirit can operate outside of the community of faith for "the Spirit blows where it wills."<sup>8</sup> (John 3<sub>8</sub>) (It would appear that Kaufman and MacQuarrie can each support their opposing views by quoting different scripture...) Working from outside the circle of faith, MacQuarrie conceives of the Holy Spirit as unitive Being, linking up Being with beings so that we have increased awareness of Being. This awareness of Being is a gift of grace, for it enables us to see the tasks before us more readily. Being is in us, and yet it is our beings that respond. The "I, yet not I" paradox can apply to the good actions that result from one who responds to the promptings of the Spirit.

Because the fruits of the Spirit can also be manifested outside of the Christian community, the occurrence of the Holy Spirit's existence in these instances does not depend upon a person's knowledge of the historical revelation of God in Jesus. There are other experiential dynamics at work. The Holy Spirit is freed, so to speak to operate as we experience that we, as beings, are more acutely sensing the presence of Being. And so, experientially, MacQuarrie seems to have solved the problems that Kaufman created. The Spirit is a free agent operating in all men in a direct way, if men will allow it to do so. The Spirit constantly calls men into the light of Being.

On the surface it appears that MacQuarrie's theology successfully

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<sup>7</sup>John MacQuarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 295.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 299.



describes without contradiction God's transcendent, yet experiential, Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, unitive Being, unites us with primordial Being, with Holy Being. What does this really mean? Ogden points out that "being-itself" is not only symbolically, but also literally nonrelative and changeless."<sup>9</sup> As was demonstrated in chapter two, a changeless god is not a personal being. Therefore, to be in union with Being does not really describe a personal relationship. This brings into question whether or not we are actually talking about a spirit at all when we speak of the unitive being that MacQuarrie postulates. Can we really "hear the voice of Being addressed to us from beyond ourselves"?<sup>10</sup> It does not seem likely.

In short, then, we find that although MacQuarrie allows more experiential possibilities in terms of one's experience of the Holy Spirit, he fails adequately to establish a connection with an entity that one could conceive of as the loving Creator, God himself. The transcendent connection is made, but it is not made to an adequate god. The experiential possibilities do not actualize when unitive being is really but a link to a static entity, Being.

And so, the question remains, how can we adequately speak of the Holy Spirit so that it will encompass the transcendent qualities of God and at the same time allow an experiential encounter? We seem to be dealing with a paradox, impossible to explain away. Transcendence implies something not knowable or able to be experienced. Yet we want to use the term transcendence for description while retaining the possibility

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<sup>9</sup>Schubert M. Ogden, The Reality of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 53.

<sup>10</sup>MacQuarrie, p. 295.

of a personal experience of the Holy Spirit. In what way is this logically possible? Kaufman is content to leave the Holy Spirit totally transcendent, its symbolic character not to be taken literally. MacQuarrie cannot deal with this question either, because while he allows for experiential awareness of the Holy Spirit, he cannot connect it to a personal living spirit, and not a static entity, unable to truly commune with persons.

The solution to this problem lies in discerning a more accurate way in which we can speak of God as transcendent. In chapter two, an analogy developed by Ogden was used to approach the topic of the personhood of God. "God is related to the universe of other beings somewhat as the human self is related to its body."<sup>11</sup> Using this analogy, we can best deal with the concerns of this chapter, also.

God is transcendent in the sense that we have "an inner awareness of our existence in relation to totality."<sup>12</sup> God is not transcendent because of his external distance from us as symbolic representations might suggest. He is transcendent because of his totality and our awareness of our limitedness relative to and in that totality. One unnecessarily tries to distance one's self from God by making the mistake of perceiving a "myth's typical misrepresentation of the divine transcendence as though it involved an immense spatial distance."<sup>13</sup> And so, for God to be totally transcendent, as Kaufman suggests, is an impossibility

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<sup>11</sup>Ogden, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

in an absolute sense. Transcendence is a matter of degree and relation, not a separate and detached category of existence.

And in this way, the link between God's transcendence and our experience of God's Spirit is established. When we experience unconditional love, can we honestly say that it is only symbolic of the love of God and not the love of God himself? This would be too conditional, actually ruling out God's presence, and not called for by God's transcendence. God's grace is his love for his creatures as expressed through the totality of beings. For example, when I love someone else, it is not I alone, but God loving him through me. It is not God's love in totality working through me, but a portion of his love working through me. The totality of God's love can be expressed only through the whole of creation. That this should happen is the hope for the Kingdom of God expressed by the One who introduced this central paradox, the One who also allowed God's love to be experienced to a signally high degree, Jesus the Christ.

Jesus attributed his acts of love and goodness to the Father, the Spirit of God working through him. That his life was consistent with this claim lays open the possibility that we too can so allow God to work through us. We need not call it a symbolic working of the Spirit, it is the work of the Spirit of God himself. In a partial and limited way we take part in the transcendence of God. Our selves transcend their sole identification with one body, and, like God, we can begin to love by finding our identification, if only in limited ways, with other beings. God is transcendent, because He is ever so much more than we actually are, and yet he is gracious enough to let us participate in experience, to

feel, somehow sense, the Spirit of pure unbounded love.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## SERMON III

In the manner in which I will read Luke 4<sup>18-19</sup>, and then the opening line of the sermon, a quote from the Lukan text, the congregation will be confronted with some of the same dynamics that were involved in Jesus' preaching at Nazareth. (a re-presentation of a re-presentation!) The no-prophet-at-home theme is not developed.

Throughout the alienation section the results of not being anointed by the Spirit of the Lord will be emphasized. That is, there is only bad news for the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed, which, in this section, includes almost everyone. God is distant, if not dead. Ogden's thought clarifies for me what this means; especially in terms of being out of touch consciously with the objective ground in reality of our confidence in our ultimate worth.

In the redemption section the anointing of the Spirit of God is understood as appropriating the gift and demand of God's love. In so doing we are called to proclaim good news for all conditions of persons. Our proclamation is more than mere words, it is the actual re-presentation of the same gift and demand of God's love that calls us in the first place. Our acts then become God's acts as we are instrumental in the redemption of the world. All of this is understood as possibility, in fact, now. As opposed to alienation, redemption involves the self-conscious appropriation of life as grace. (See definition of Holy Spirit

as proposed in chapter six) Part of this appropriation involves our realization of our potential to become a part of God's creative presence in the world.

The discipleship section of this sermon is a direct call to appropriate the good news, be released, recover sight, and be free, with the emphasis upon letting our lives proclaim the same good news. Much room is left for expansion in terms of a community's, a city's, a state's, a nation's, or a world's most pressing needs at any particular time. This section then, is incomplete, and awaits only the particular situation in time in which it will be preached for illustrative material to fill it in.

WHOSE SPIRIT IS UPON YOU?  
LUKE 4<sup>18-19</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

No one can fault Jesus for not being perfectly clear about his intentions for ministry. He chose the words of the prophet Isaiah to express his experience of being anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach good news. Good news is usually understood in the context of bad news. And bad news is all too often the story of our lives. My impression is that even today, this scripture can be fulfilled again in our hearing, if we will be sensitive to the ever-present voice of God's Spirit.

## ALIENATION (JUDGMENT)

Sometimes poor people are those who do not have much money. And, truly poor people are those who have no value whatsoever. Those who are totally poverty-stricken are those who live life as if love is futile, as if God is dead, as if life is a useless waste. The truly poor are those for whom value and worth and meaning are make-believe concepts in a make-believe world. The truly poor are destitute even though they may be millionaires, for they have totally lost sight of what is really important in life. And no government, no state-aid program exists that wages war on that kind of poverty.

Sometimes captives are people who are in prison, people locked in jail or in padded cells. And, those who are truly captives are those who find themselves locked into a life they cannot change, those who are miserable and yet, seem to be unable to break out of the bonds which enslave them. Some of us can feel trapped by our jobs, we feel locked in by economic obligations. Some of us feel captive to an image we project that is not really who we are. Some of us are captive in a lifestyle that is not bringing satisfaction, and there appears to be no way out.

Sometimes blind people are those who do not perceive reflected light images from their external environment. And, the truly blind are those who cannot perceive the fruits and gifts of the Spirit in spite of 20/20 vision. There are so many ways in which we can be blind to what is really going on. Some of us are blind to the potential in everyone we

meet for a meaningful and loving encounter, be it a few moments while we ride an elevator, a half hour on a bus, three hours on a plane, or even one life-time with a spouse. Some of us are blind to faults we have which are glaring in the eyes of others. Some of us cannot see a purpose or calling for our lives, and we drift aimlessly, not seeing one mission after another, one destiny after another, calling us out of our darkness into phenomenal and beautiful lights. Sometimes we are blind to the love that others are giving to us as we label them as nosy, or out to get us, or trying to con us. We can be so blind when others' suffering is related to our over-consumption. And, we can be so blind when it comes to realizing the happiness that could be ours if only we would look for those values which are eternal, rather than passing.

Sometimes, oppressed people are those met upon by political or social or economic discrimination. And, those who are truly oppressed, are those who are at the mercy of a host of demons. Some of us are oppressed by demons of pride, demons of despair, demons of free-floating anxiety, demons of bitterness, demons of mis-directed anger, and demons that make us feel so empty, and useless, and as well off--dead. Such demons can drive even those who seem to really have it together, like the classic Richard Cory or even Freddie Prinze, to suicide. Yes, even a good, white, anglo-saxon, protestant can be oppressed in America; by our own phony ideals and values and repressive advertising. Is the American dream really 2 cars in every garage, a chicken in every pot? Is an opulent lifestyle really freedom from oppression? An epidemic of neuroses would suggest, no.

How do we respond to a world in which being poor and captive and



blind and oppressed can take on such nightmarish proportions? Some folks would call themselves realists and suggest that that's simply the way life is, that's the way the cookie crumbles. We are helpless victims in a world where survival is the key. If you bow out through suicide or whatever, the stronger will survive. And the game will get more vicious while we pretend to be civilized in what has become a concrete, polluted jungle. Life is a freakish chemical accident and we are but mutants in an otherwise sterile universe. How can there be any meaning for the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed? There is no meaning, and there is no meaning in the fact that there is no meaning. No fairy princess is going to come down and save us. Guardian angels have been permanently laid off. Life is bad news, and no philosophy can save us from that conclusion.

#### REDEMPTION (GRACE)

In the midst of bad news, in the midst of a small country in despair beneath the military foot of the Roman Empire, in the midst of a Jewish faith which waivers when God does not provide another Moses, Jesus announces that Isaiah's ancient prophecy has been fulfilled. Now is the time for redemption, the acceptable year of our Lord. Those whose narrow understandings of poor, oppressed, and captive led them to think merely in terms that were economic and political, knew for sure that Jesus was wrong. But those who truly heard the depth of his message began to sense that the redemption of which he spoke would be one no political entity could take away.

Jesus declares, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." In the secular world today, anyone who talks of hearing spirits is considered sick. If the spirits speak from outside of one's bodies, he or she is considered psychotic, if they are heard from within, he or she is considered schizophrenic. But Jesus doesn't speak of any dialogue with spirits. He claims that the Spirit of God is upon him because he is anointed to do certain things. In the ancient world one was consecrated to a certain task; for example, as a king, by having oil poured over one's head. We have no record of such a ritual for Jesus, unless one consider his baptism by John, in which it is said he experienced God's Spirit descending upon him like a dove, the symbol of peace.

In any case, one can conclude that Jesus used the word "anointed" metaphorically to refer to his calling, his sense of mission, his realization of there being NOW, in fact, good news for the poor, release for the captive, sight for the blind, and liberty for the oppressed.

Jesus made his whole life a response to the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit calls us as Jesus called to appropriate life as a gift, as grace, unearned and undeserved, given to us freely, with which we can realize either heaven or hell, right here and now. God sustains the spark that makes our protoplasm, life, and He lures us to realize our best possibilities in every moment. Jesus sensed wasted possibilities in the lives around him and through his life of preaching, teaching, healing, and even dying he re-presented the promise and the hope that transformed the lost into found, and his actions became the actions of God himself.

Good news for the poor is that money and possessions mean little

if there is an abundance of loving relationships and a higher perspective in one's life. One reason why the television series, "The Walton's," is so popular is the dramatic way in which it portrays the richness of a family's existence during the struggles of the depression years. Good news is that being poor often forces one to focus in on what really is important. And one realizes that truth and beauty and goodness are priceless.

Release for the captives is the undeniable fact that even in the most restrictive and de-humanizing of circumstances life still holds out possibilities for realizing value and meaning. Victor Frankl, a psychologist who survived  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years of concentration camps during World War II, writes of the prisoner: "Even in this socially limiting environment, in spite of this societal restriction upon his personal freedom, the ultimate freedom still remains his: the freedom even in the camp to give some shape to his existence."<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Thompson, who, after visiting Dachau and studying the records of camp life there, reports, "They who remained men, in conditions of lowest bestiality, served an Image and an Ideal higher than the highest achievements of man."<sup>2</sup> Release for the captives is that their human dignity, their image of God, can never ever be taken away involuntarily. They can only be forfeited through deciding to relinquish them.

Sight for the blind becomes a reality not only when the physically blind are healed and see images, but when we see ourselves through objective lenses which bring into sharp focus all of these attitudes and

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<sup>1</sup>Robert C. Leslie, Jesus and Logotherapy (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

beliefs which block us from growth. Jesus not only proclaims recovery of sight to the blind, he even helps us to see more clearly than ever before how we might see God at work in our lives if we would follow him in discipleship.

Liberty for the oppressed becomes more than a revolutionary slogan when the oppressed throw off not only their chains and shackles, but all of their anger, their bitterness, their anxieties, and their despair. True freedom is realized when it becomes freedom for, rather than freedom from. Jesus sensed the liberty which is possible when he experienced being anointed by the Spirit of God. The Apostle Paul writes of this freedom in his second letter to the Christians at Corinth:

"Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is Spirit."

#### DISCIPLESHIP (SERVICE)

We probably would not be sitting here this morning if all Jesus did was stand around and talk about good news for the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty to the oppressed. Jesus is not remembered merely because of his proclamation. He is remembered more significantly for the way in which he put flesh and blood on his words. With Jesus, the poor, the blind, the captive, and the oppressed actually experienced the good news. For it seems that Jesus confronted people with their own lives in such a way that they experienced the immediate necessity to decide at once whether or not to allow the Spirit

of God to work within them. Christ helped them make their decisions of faith by assuring them of the ultimate importance of how their lives were spent, and then he helped the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed by honestly loving them as whole persons.

Are you poor? Are you captive? Are you blind? Are you oppressed? Hear the good news, be released, recover your sight, take hold of your liberty.

And as you claim your new life, by the power of the Holy Spirit within you, let everything you do proclaim the good news. Amen.

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